



Healthy impatience.

Interview

Urs Güttinger

CTO, Bossard Group

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Urs Güttinger is CTO of the Bossard Group. From its headquarters in Zug, the company has become one of the market leaders in fastening technology in Europe, North and South America, and Asia-Pacific, with a network of partners in every region of the world. 2,500 staff meet the needs of 2,500 suppliers and 25,000 customers. Bossard delivers intelligent logistics systems that optimise production facilities, such as those of Tesla, a major client. It handles 8,000 tons of materials in Zug alone – and the same services worldwide.

Mr Güttinger, how did an iron-mongers, founded in 1831, evolve into an internationally successful enterprise?

Urs Güttinger: Fastening technology was once a speciality business but everything was standardised in the mid-19th century and it has become a commodity these days. By the 1980s, we had begun to offer our customers an integrated service encompassing products, engineering and logistics. We wanted to be at the front of the pack in our field and we've achieved this goal.

What brought you to Bossard?

I originally trained as a mechanic and had already specialised as a mechatronics engineer during my apprenticeship. I learnt how to programme, took vocational training courses, worked for firms both great and small in IT and became a project leader for software systems. Then, almost 25 years ago, Bossard was looking for a specialist to industrialise SmartBin and ARIMS software – that piqued my interest.

What is ARIMS software?

In a nutshell, it manages inventory locally for our customers and automatically organises replenishment of products.

How did you approach the task?

Right at the beginning, I wrote an almost 70-page spec sheet for the ARIMS platform. I still didn't really understand much about how Bossard worked but along the way I had designed processes and developed software – not on my own, but always in cooperation with other people. A department of 30 people came together and I was also put in charge of operations. Our aim was clear: we wanted to market our SmartBins, which are boxes with integrated weight sensors that provide updates on stock levels and automatically order new supplies, all over the world. We've achieved this goal, too.

And then you were finally happy?

No, no! I am a person of healthy impatience, it's just who I am. I'm interested in what's new, the unknown. Two years ago, I had the opportunity to get to grips with global development issues in the newly created position of a CTO; I was offered the job and I got started. Augmented reality, robotics issues, digital platforms, these are the things that occupy me these days. My focus is now primarily strategic and conceptual, I have left the operational reins in good hands.

“Solve the problem before it arises.”

What is your approach to innovation?

That's relatively simple here as Bossard has always been innovative. The key thing is to pay attention. You should always be looking out for a customer's needs, asking yourself: "How can I help them become more productive? How can I add value to their businesses?" We're constantly looking for new answers, new solutions, new technologies, new ideas.

What about the innovation culture at Bossard?

I think we are in very good shape. If you have an idea at Bossard that is intended to make customers better, to make us better, i.e. to become more efficient and cost-effective, then people will always lend an ear.

How do you motivate yourself?

With joy! Joy at something new, something cool. And joy begets curiosity, doesn't it? Of course it does! As I say, I have a healthy impatience, I'm wide awake, I want to be quick, make decisions and then get on to the next challenge.

There is a lot of history between you and Ergon.

Yes, there is, because two key considerations are on point. The first is that we, generally, get what we have been promised. The second is that I can challenge the people at Ergon and they take up the gauntlet. We want to be world champions, not limp in second. We have to win – and Ergon plays ball.

Is there anything you particularly appreciate?

Yes, Ergon has highly educated people who are top in their field. We can set them challenges. We're on the same page. Ergon works proactively without you having to ask them. Its staff anticipate what's round the next corner and go the extra mile.

“I’m interested in what’s new, the unknown.”

As you look back, what makes you proud?

We set new standards with our SmartBins and Industry 4.0 was second nature as far back as 1998. With the SmartBin, we developed an intelligent weighing system that was affordable – we knew what we could leave out and what we couldn't. Nowadays there are 300,000 SmartBins weighing stock levels for our customers in 30 countries, all running like clock-work and connected. We replaced the two-box system with our SmartBin right round the world.

In your experience, what character traits are required to be a successful personality?

You need to be able to recognise what is possible, bring the right people with you, always focus on the benefits. "Solve the problem before it arises", was always our slogan, our motto, and it still is today.

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